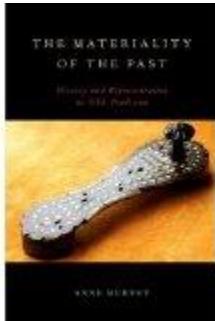


The Materiality of the Past – History and Representation in Sikh Tradition by Anne Murphy
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Book Review: Kavneet Singh



Anne Murphy is currently an Assistant Professor and Chair of Punjabi Language, Literature and Sikh Studies at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada who replaced the infamous Harjot Oberoi. This book is Anne's doctoral thesis.

One of the primary premises used by Anne is trying to delineate the fact that the formation of the current Sikh physical identity is more of a recent 20th century event rather than continuous one based on the various proofs of the material/object/relics as she calls them.

Chapter 1 – Introduction: Forms of Memory and History:

This book, which focuses on the changing historical constitution of the community through the life of objects and sacred sites, is meant to augment, not replace, the textually defined narratives that have dominated understandings of the formation of the Sikh community. Indeed, it will be argued that the material and the textual are allied in the Sikh context, and should not be seen in oppositional terms. Attention to material and visual representation therefore may in fact dispel concerns (rather than raise them) regarding such practices, once they are placed in the broader context of cultural memory production and a Sikh historical imperative..... [Page 12]

Anne has clearly indicated what she is trying to achieve through this book but unfortunately it raises those same concerns which she very eloquently claims will not be raised.

In general, Shani argues that the Sikh community provides an example where, “the sovereignty of the territorialized nation-state over the religious community as established in the aftermath of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 can no longer be assumed in our ‘global age’,” such that .”Sikh diasporic narratives do not attempt to place territorial limits on the sovereignty of the quam [or nation] ...[because] the contemporary phase of globalization has effectively de-territorialized sovereignty....In the end, however, neither are the grievances that animate the Khalistan movement resolved, nor is such a movement necessitated, by an cultural history.....[Pages 17 & 18]

Anne has quoted Giorgia Shani to make her point not realizing that Shani's basic premises are seriously flawed as his entire book is based on Harjot Oberoi's premise of questioning the keshdhari identity, using the victimhood theory and finally since the Sikhs are spread across in the diaspora there is no need for a homeland. On one hand Anne does not want the reader to read too much into her research of Sikh religious history, yet very subtly alluding to the objects of reverence as proof of a vague opaqueness in reference to the Sikh identity.

Chapter 2 – Sikh Materialities:

The murti – the devotional image central to much (but not all) Hindu religious practice – represents the most prominent example of visual…… the related religions of South Asia – Janism, Buddhism, what we now designate with a single term “Hinduism”……[Page 25]

Anne clearly has lumped Jainism and Buddhism into Hinduism, keeping the Sikh Faith out, but in her footnotes on the same page she defines it, as really coming out on their own in the nineteenth century, which questions the continuum of the kesh-dhari identity making it ambiguous with no clarity and further whether she really thinks the Sikh Faith is independent of Hinduism is the next question.

That presence – the presence of the community that continues – is the one that lives in the present through the narration such objects and places participate in. Thus, each place becomes a stage of the narration of this community: the place of its articulation, its lived and experienced aspect; and each object represents a relationship: a past relationship with the Guru and a continuing relationship of community constituted through the Guru. In this way, the past memory and the past as a continuing presence becomes simultaneous – as Veena Das observed within Khalistani narratives, which collapsed distinctions between past and present and located current conflicts as continuations of the past. The temporal integration that Das highlights therefore relates to a larger imperative within Sikh tradition, tied to the experience of the Word in the continuous present and the narration of the past as history, out of memory. [Page 38]

It is interesting to note that Anne has quoted Veena Das to elucidate her point. Das's writings are pretty controversial to begin with, as most of her source material is either Indian government propaganda or from the students of Hew McLeod. Anne's book is about religious material objects/artifacts and how they are used in everyday Sikh religious tradition. Does Anne expect Sikhs to experience the 'Word' in the present without relating it to the past? If that is true; it is akin to stating that all Bible reading Christians are living in the past and present simultaneously because the Bible is 1,600 years old approximately but the believers are reading it in 2013. I am not sure Anne realizes that the Guru Granth Sahib is also a repository of actual history between the late 15th and mid-16th century.

As this example demonstrates, persons act as a source of authority, in similar terms and in some charismatic authority exists in general terms in Sikh contexts – leaders such as now-deceased Harbhajan Singh Yogi in the United States and Mohinder Singh of the Guru Nanak Nishkam

Seva Jatha in Birmingham, England, demonstrate that individual leaders do retain importance within the tradition, even without blood ties to the Gurus.....[Page 52]

Anne has stated part of the facts. Men like Harbhajan and Mohinder have influenced and continue to influence a small sub-sect of Sikhs, but this entire process is dangerously loaded. The Sikh religious ethos is very straightforward as the Guru Granth Sahib is the 'Guru' and the final authenticated scripture and the Sikh collective, the 'panth' has the power to wield as it deems fit for the betterment and welfare of the Faith. Therefore all 'ba ba black sheep' like the two mentioned by Anne are primarily charlatans in religious garb and there are thousands like them plying their trade in Punjab and across the diaspora. If some ignorant Sikhs are being led by their noses; that does not mean that there is any kind of religious tradition among the Sikhs. This is precisely what is being strongly discouraged albeit by the Sikh Missionary Colleges, right thinking volunteers in Punjab and other tireless volunteers in the diaspora, though with limited success. Whether the Bedis of Una (Himachal Pardesh), or the local village religious charlatan, their basic modus operandi is making money on the emotions of the ignorant and absolutely does not make it, a Sikh tradition.

If so, they may not signify "through historical vicissitudes, the distinctive identity and collective aspirations of the Sikh people." As Neki argues, but also, as he alludes, act as "keepsakes of the tenth Guru who sacrificed all that was his for the Khalsa."[Page 63]

On one hand Anne understands and agrees that the "5Ks" are part of the Khalsa identity yet she negates it by making the articles of Faith into 'keepsakes' by quoting J.S.Neki. Looks like a billion Christians around the globe are only carrying around a tiny little cross around their necks as a 'keepsake' and nothing more!

I have suggested that there is life of the image and the object within Sikh tradition that is not a series of anomalies, nor simply equivalent to Hindu practices. Instead, Sikh materiality exists as part of a larger approach to the memorial, as the material representation of the relationships and authority that constitute the community and its living past. The 5 K's can be seen as the generalized marker of the Guru producing the community in memory of the Guru and on the path or panth (the term used for the community) the Guru explicated.....The Babri Masjid was destroyed by Hindu kar-sewaks in 1992 because it was said to have been built on the temple that commemorated the birthplace of Ram.....It would be wrong to assume simple equivalence between this case and the Sikh interest in history of the tradition located in place; it would be a mistake to read the long history of marking of the Indian landscape with sacred geography tied to representation of the past as only a modern and communalized concern.....[Page 65]

Even though Anne makes it clear that the Sikhs cannot be compared to the Hindus in reference to their memorializing material objects, she still ends up using a Hindu comparison. The issue is simple, namely the objects of the Sikhs are real, whereas the objects/religious-history of the Hindus - pure myth, hence comparing both is ludicrous.

Chapter 3 – Writing the Community: Literary Sources from the Eighteenth Century:

This court, therefore, was not necessarily a fully political one. Deol and Rinehart have argued that the Dasam Granth exhibits a “new Sikh conception of the role of the leader with both spiritual and worldly responsibilities,” in the words of Rinehart, and that “the Khalsa notion of Dharam [right conduct] valorizes ideas of rule and political sovereignty in a way that classical definitions and others contemporary to the Khalsa do not,” constituting an “unusual if not unique” orientation in the period, according to Deol..... [Page 74]

Firstly the Dasam Granth is a highly questionable piece of literature as there is no conclusive proof that it was written by the Tenth Guru. Secondly other than about 70 pages which find concurrence on the touch stone of the Guru Granth Sahib, the rest absolutely does not. Thirdly evidence suggests that Hindu poets and scribes have written the Bachittar Natak which is its real name and not the Dasam Granth. Fourth there are sections which are pornographic in nature, which makes it further clearer that it cannot be religious “Sikh” literature but very likely “Hindu” literature. Fifth it cannot be simple coincidence that the Bachittar Natak has the same number of pages as the Guru Granth Sahib. The point here is that, it is completely irrelevant which language the “BG” was written in, as it was not written by Sikhs or the Tenth Guru, therefore to deduce so much ‘Sikh tradition’ out of it is redundant.

Generally these begin with writings attributed to the Tenth Guru, particularly his Bachittar Natak. According to Surjit Hans, who has written extensively on these materials, the Bachittar Natak (like all gurbilas literature) is singularly concerned with history: ‘this is a work of nascent history,’ he writes, “which under the stress of circumstances, is more faithful to the demands of the future than the quiet details of the present..... [Page 84]

Like I have mentioned earlier, the Bachittar Natak is not the writings of the Tenth Guru, secondly all ‘gurbilas’ literature are highly questionable and inimical to the faith. The Sikh Faith has had Hindus of varying hues trying to destroy the ethos from the very beginning of its history. Hindu writers especially Brahmins and Sikhs with very close blood ties to the upper caste Hindus, firstly were more educated than the general Sikh populace and secondly those same folks with biased caste motivations went on to fabricate literature and posit it onto the Sikhs as real history. As time goes on this becomes Sikh materiality of the past for the Annes of the future to do research on! It is akin to equating ‘Grimm’s Fairy Tales’ with Christian religious tradition and doing serious research on it.

Deol has shown that the central point at issue in this teaching regarding the prohibition of rituals associated with the death of relatives was the avoidance of a Mughal tax on this practice, and as such represented a challenge to Mughal sovereignty. Deol relates this injunction to a larger phenomenon, namely, the creation of what he calls a “metanarrative” derived from the Dasam Granth in which the aspirations of the Khalsa community to define itself as distinct and

sovereign were placed within a framework based on puranic myth, defining dharam in a mode that is simultaneously religious and political.....[Page 89]

Anne's reading above is very loaded. The Tenth Guru was not the first to ask his Sikhs to stop and refrain from all mundane ritualistic practices; as this was started from the very first Guru mentioned in the Guru Granth Sahib the Sikh Scripture. The fact that there was a Mughal tax is secondary and not the primary reason for the Guru's injunction. Further the 'metanarrative' Anne is bringing out does not make much sense and the reason being that the Gurus spent around 239 years to groom and inculcate the values they wanted in the Sikhs. The Bachittar Natak aka Dasam Granth only came about fifty years after the passing on of the Tenth Guru. The Khalsa's distinct sovereignty did not require a Bachittar Natak to define itself. If that was the case the question arises, 'what was the interim political literature' which helped guide the Khalsa through the most turbulent part of the early 18th century?

McLeod notes that the historical value of the Chaupa Singh Rahitnama is of questionable quality, as is true of Kesar Singh's Bansavalinama, another product of the Chibber clan from later in the eighteenth century. As McLeod notes, the texts are most useful not so much for the history they present, but for their portrayal of their contemporary present.....[Page 99]

Anne has rightly noted that the some of these Rahitnamas are of questionable quality, but the bigger question is McLeod's integrity itself, as he has fabricated information many times over. Anne could have used better sources so that the end result would be more honest and accurate.

In Sainpati, it is the community that constitutes this continuing authority, this continuing presence.....[Page 105]

Anne has concluded correctly as Sainpati's Guru Sobha is a well-respected source of information, but the injunction given by the Tenth Guru is unambiguous and clear in reference to the 'panth' being the continuing authority which takes all important decisions collectively.

Interestingly, as suggested by the rahit citation above, such hukamnames themselves came to act as relics, and even today are collected and displayed by families, such as Bhai Rupa and with the Dalla family.....[Page 108]

No doubt material objects such as swords all the way to written edicts by the Gurus are treated respectfully very similar to treating material objects of a deceased loved one. But does that make 'it' into a religious tradition is highly debatable. The Sikh primarily worship the 'one' formless Creator with and through the Guru Granth Sahib with all else simply being, emotional attachments to 'material objects of past' like a person holds onto a long deceased loved one's memory. That definitely does not make it a religious tradition.

Chapter 4 – Into the Nineteenth Century: History and Sovereignty:

Sainpathi's Guru Sobha, it has been argued, is concerned with the narration of events related to the Guru in world, alongside doctrinal, theological, and prescriptive injunctions – these are tied modes of narration, which focus on the interaction of the Guru in the world with his devotees and the continuing life of the community in history.....Bhai Santoh Singh's Sri Gur Partap Suraj Granth, however, is structured differently. In the Suraj Granth, we see a reorientation of narrative/historical focus – a transition to a full explication of the Guru's community in detail and an articulation of the authority of the Guru in relation to this community, reminiscent of the kinds of narrations available within the Janam-Sakhis....[Pages 113-114]

Sikhs had very little respite from defending themselves from the Mughals in most of the 18th century for them to be able to stop, think and write about their situation. In the huge vacuum there were extremely few writers who were grounded in sound Sikh centered theological thought. Most Sikh writers were either from the upper class and/or with the divergent sects such as Nirmalas, Udasi, etc, and could really not bring about the correct Sikh theology to the forefront.

Harjot Oberoi highlights the role of Narotam in articulating aspects of "Sanatan Sikh" ideology, as represented in general by Nirmala scholars like him....[Page 120-121]

The entire premise of Harjot is wrong so to even quote him is a waste, because as explained earlier, there was a genre of scholars grounded in the Hindu belief system, therefore their writings portray a hybridized Sikhi, when in fact, needs to be discarded. The Sikh collective did not suddenly all become Sanatan Sikhs one day because of a few Nirmala writers. It is the other way around, i.e., the writers tried to influence their own mindset on the public at large, with very limited success.

The introduction to the Suraj Granth, written in 1931, the year of the second printing of the text.....yet history is important, since it describes the Gurus' actions in the world; it achieves a status below the bani (word) and hukam (order) of the Guru....[Page 124]

Anne is correct in her assertion about the lower status of any other literature, but to further clarify, all the 'grahns' other than Guru Granth Sahib have varying importance depending on which particular subgroup of Sikhs one is talking to, but the vast Sikh collective, simply revere one Scripture - the Guru Granth Sahib and all else is just literature.

Newspapers flourished in the early twentieth century: of approximately 260 newspapers extant in Punjab in 1905, 17 were in Punjabi in the Gurmukhi script, while 198 were in Urdu....[Page 127]

The reason for the fewer newspapers was that, the Sikhs were also in much smaller numbers compared to the Muslims and the Hindus among whom they lived. During Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule the Sikh population in the kingdom was between 13-14%. Secondly most of the

Urdu speakers in Punjab actually spoke Punjabi and still do to this day. The Muslims wrote their script in Urdu/Persian even though the spoken language was Punjabi.

The book under examination here, Sundari (1898), was Bhai Vir Singh's first novel and is also known as the first modern Punjabi novel.....Imaginative history is achieved in Sundari in multiple ways.....[Pages 134-135]

Even though Bhai Vir Singh was a well renowned scholar he had weaknesses in his theological thought process. It is the same Bhai Vir Singh who propagated the fact that Guru Gobind Singh actually went to mediate at Hemkund in the Himalayas in his past life. Today, thanks to his fabrication thousands of Sikhs take a pilgrimage to a Gurdwara at Hemkund in the Himalayas.

The Khalsa is not limited to state sovereignty; it represents a greater ideal....[Page 148]

Again Anne is right, but her statement is loaded. There is no question that the Khalsa were meant to be a fraternity of universal brotherhood standing up as one for the welfare of others in need. Yet at the same time the Khalsa were completely sovereign. From the very beginning the Gurus established towns, then forts and actually created physical space within yet outside the prevailing cultural and political domain. This revolutionary concept would not happen if the ultimate goal was not to be sovereign politically; because without temporal power no religion can sustain itself, survive and thrive.

Chapter 5 – A History of Possession:

The debate over who controls a religious site came to be of central importance in the battle for control over Gurdwaras that takes place in the 1920s., the Gurdwara Reform Movement....The status and management of such religious sites therefore did not exist in separate order from more general policies towards land management and entitlements.....[Page 155]

Nowhere does Anne explain the real reason why the Gurdwara reform Movement had to take place in the 1920s. Except for the Sikhs, there were no separate laws enacted by the British in British (pre) India for any other religious group. The Sikhs were the only ones whose religious institutions were officially hijacked by the British, and Hindu Mahants called 'pujaris' were installed who ran all historic Gurdwaras for nearly 70 years while the Sikhs had no control over their religious institutions or their destiny. The land management and entitlements are a completely separate issue from the more important 'special laws enacted for the Sikhs' based on political chicanery and base stratagem, so as to rein in their fiery spirit emanating from the Gurdwaras. Another case and point is the Central government's role in controlling the SGPC to date which is a continuation of what the British had enacted and left behind.

Chapter 6 – Colonial Governance and Gurdwara Reform:

The statement also notes “the martial characteristics have been kept purposely alive both by Government and the Sikhs themselves”, revealing the self-understanding of the colonial administrators as patrons of Sikhism.....[Page 190]

Anne quotes V.W.Smith, by clearly alluding that Sikhism was kept alive by the British government which is untrue. The British had to keep a tight leash on a recently conquered formidable foe, and what better way than to co-opt them all into the British-Indian armed forces with a twist. The Khalsas were not willing to change, but reluctantly started to tie their beards. Formally initiated Sikhs were allowed to serve with a caveat that they could not wear the religiously mandated ‘kirpan’. So the British used the Sikhs as cannon fodder for their own selfish reasons, but not as noble patrons. It is the Sikhs themselves who tried their best to keep their religious traditions alive but no thanks to the canny British.

One aspect of that administration was the investment in the agricultural development in what came to be called ‘canal-colonies’ - settlements in western Punjab dependent upon new canals built by the colonial administration – which provided not only for agricultural expansion in the region, but also the retrenchment of the political forces that supported the British rule...[Page 195]

It is true that the British developed the canal-colonies, but again for their own benefit to export the commodities to England. Secondly, by giving land to ex-servicemen the British were doing something very normal, which is to continue to keep the allegiance of the Sikhs, not any different than keeping the lords of the various estates satiated, and or keeping the various tribal clans happy earlier, in England. Thirdly, the reason for the Sikhs to side with the British against the sepoys of the “Mutiny of 1857” was simply political. Those same mostly Hindu mutineers were the ones the Sikhs had fought as enemies less than a decade earlier and had no love lost for them.

Ruchi Ram Sahini (1863-1948), Punjabi intellectual, witness to the Gurdwara Reform Movement, and member of the Punjabi Legislature Council who participated in the passing of legislation to address gurdwara reform, described the gurdwara movement as “the best and most inspiring instance of Mahatma Gandhi’s teachings of non-violence in thought, word and deed,” and declared that “Mahatma Gandhi himself could not have expected more faithful followers to carry out his non-violent non-cooperative struggle in the face of the gravest provocation.....[Page 199-200]

Firstly, Ruchi Ram Sahini was an upper class Hindu. Secondly, if he helped pass legislation to reform gurdwaras it wasn’t any special favor to the Sikhs rather a way forward for Hindus like him to get changes done in the overall existing political system. Thirdly, and most important it was absolutely not the teachings of the infamous M.K.Gandhi that inspired half a million Sikhs to be led by Jathedar Kartar Singh Jabbar, but in fact the teachings of the enlightened Sikh Gurus, to be completely non-violent in the face of violence. Fourth, it was in fact M.K.Gandhi who copied, stole the idea of spinning cotton (khaddar), boycotting British goods, all started by

the great Sikh pacifist Bhai Ram Singh in the late 1900s. Fifth, again it was Jathedars Kartar Singh Jabbar's peaceful protest, the largest of its kind in Asia which opened Gandhi's eyes and the canny 'bania' not only plagiarized the fantastic idea but made it his own, as though he invented it. Sixth, M.K.Gandhi conducted three major civil disobedience marches and not one was for ending British rule. It was only to undermine the government and promote anarchy (The Gandhi Nobody Knows; Richard Greiner, P83, 1983). Finally, it is unfortunate that Anne quote's Gandhi here, but his whole life was mostly a pack of lies and not the truth. Here is what his own wife Kasturba Gandhi says, "Yes, I know my husband. He (is) always mischief." (Kasturba Gandhi, The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi, p 109).

The definition of who was a Sikh was already by this time open to serious and contentious debate; the definition (and the act of setting one) had become highly politicized since the second quarter of the nineteenth century, with the founding of the Siri Guru Singh Sabha of Amritsar in 1873, followed by the Lahore Sabha in 1879.....[Page 203]

The start of second quarter of the 19th century would be 1825 and the zenith of Maharaja Ranjit Singh rule. This was a time when his court was referred to as the Khalsa Darbar. His army the 'Khalsa Fauj', his courtiers went out of their way to dress like a Sikh, which meant a full beard and a full turban. Rather even the European, including an American Col. Gardner dressed like a Sikh. The Maharaja himself was the most magnanimous king in all of Asia, where people of every Faith were treated as equal and with respect. It is on record, that there was no death penalty carried out during nearly half century of his rule. At no time was there an issue of who a Sikh was when even foreigners knew who and what a Sikh looked like. The country of Punjab and the surrounding kingdoms all knew, except for those who wanted to feign ignorance. Once the Gurdwaras were usurped from the Sikhs immediately after the annexation of Punjab, the slow erosion of Sikh values started, first through proselytization by the British and American missionaries in earnest, then another Gujarati; Dayanand who of all places took advantage of the big hearted Sikhs to evangelize in Punjab to their own detriment. Without any political clout, without any control over their historic gurdwaras, without educational facilities, Sikhs were ripe for the plucking. But, that still did not change the fact that the definition of a Sikh was still clear. The only change that happened was that all the pretenders masquerading as Sikhs during Maharaja's rule reverted back to the Hindu fold. The Rehat Maryada is an extremely important document and a timely one, but that again does not change the previous 200+ years of continuous 'Sikhi'. Anne seems to put the onus on this particular document, as though if this did not exist, defining who is a Sikh, would be nebulous. Now, that is not only ridiculous but stupid.

In 1920, therefore, in response to the criticism of the management of the Golden Temple and the request for independent governance, the Government of India formed a thirty-six person council to manage the site; reformists in turn formed their own committee instead, including those serving on the government council.....[Page 208]

The Darbar Sahib complex contained the Akal Takht, the seat of temporal authority which is unique in religious history. British knew that the spirit of the Sikh emanated from the Darbar Sahib, which included the Harmandar Sahib and the Akal Takht Sahib – the repository of ‘miri and piri’. The devious British knew that they had to blunt this, otherwise their own position would be in trouble, therefore the complete control of all major Sikh religious institutions starting from the 1850 till 1919. In the late 1880s a very large Church was built right next to the ‘parkarma’ edge of the Darbar Sahib complex, which was later removed by the Sikhs. The British tried every dirty trick to dilute the Sikh ethos, and the only reason they never outright rejected the turban and beard was to use the Sikhs as cannon fodder in the armed forces.

The designation of “Sikh” versus “Hindu” was key feature of debate over a bill introduced to the Legislative Council in 1921 as a means to address the conflict, since “identity” as one of the two was fundamental to the issue as construed in the Council: a Hindu could not care for a Gurdwara in question without sacrificing aspects of the “Sikhness” of the site. The exact construal of this definition provided one reason the Akalis rejected this bill: the Akalis demanded that the definition of the Sikh be limited to Khalsa Sikhs, while Sahajdhari (defined as those who do not adhere to all aspects of the Khalsa rahit) Sikhs and Hindus protested the criticism of some mahants, and wanted to maintain aspects of the status quo.....[Page 211]

Anne has touched a raw nerve and the entire McLeodian clique keeps harping on this same issue and time line in Sikh history. Firstly, just because the British were in control and the largest power block happened to be Hindus of Punjab did not mean that the Sikhs did not know who they were exactly! Secondly, Sikhs having no Vatican like authority, especially when their most sacred sites were in the control of British appointed toadies, could not resurrect a religious power base which would not be subservient to the whims of the British-Hindu co-opting juggernaut. Thirdly, the word ‘Sahajdhari’ is redundant, because it was invented by the Hindus of Punjab after the annexation of the ‘Sikh kingdom’. Fourth, this word was shoved down the Sikh public primarily to infiltrate, make themselves the power brokers relating to the basic postulates of the Sikh Faith. This is a most unusual situation in any Faith where a completely different Faith group (Hindus) taking advantage of the precarious political-religious situation of the Sikhs tries to dictate its own terms on the other. Fifth, this basically boils down to the ‘Rehait Maryada’ document. If this same document was written in 1708 would that make ‘continuous Sikhi’ okay in the eyes of these western scholars? On the flip side let us assume there is no ‘Rehait Maryada’ document today; does that mean Sikhs are not Sikhs anymore? I see no ‘code of conduct’ akin to the ‘Rehait Maryada’ among the over 250 sects of Christianity, so does that fact, deny all those followers their right to being called Christian? This completely unwarranted interference by the Hindus in the internal affairs of the Sikhs started right from the time of Guru Nanak Sahib but got vicious after 1850 when the Sikhs were politically down and out. The Brahmin, Khatri and Vasyas groups of the Hindus realized the economic advantage of being a Sikh and started a novel idea of making their oldest son a Sikh (physically), while the rest of the family continued to remain Hindu. These households preformed all the Hindu rituals, except added one more, by

going to the Gurdwara also. This very dichotomous relationship exists among less than 5% of the Sikh population. Imagine a Sikh family who decides that the oldest daughter will be a ‘Catholic nun’. The entire family prays and goes to the gurdwara and once in a while the daughter who they have by choice made into a nun goes to the Church, thereby following two paths, however divergent. If that is not extremely odd I wonder what is?

Fox argues that when the Akali activists were protesting and agitating for control over Sikh shrines, they were “in act of defining what was a Sikh shrine; that is, as they carried out their collective action to capture shrines, they were creating the boundaries of their religious tradition.”.....I do not mean that such shrines were actually created in the movement: the Darbar Sahib existed long before the Gurdwara Reform Movement, as did many, many other sites whose significance was based on the representation of the past as a formative ground from the community.....[Page 219]

On one hand Anne quotes Fox by stating that the defined boundaries were being created by the reformers of the Singh Sabha movement yet she backs off by mentioning that the Darbar Sahib existed long before the movement. It seems to be specialty of the McLeodian school to make your point subtly on one hand and then defending your position by claiming the opposite in the same breath so no one notices the sleight of hand. Based on Anne’s above example, here is an analogy. A family loses their house because a bunch of criminals forcibly take over their home and throw them out. After some time the family is able to take back the house they lived in previously which is legally theirs to start with and kick the illegal squatters out. Does the family in this situation, creating a ‘new family boundary’ for themselves or have they simply righted a wrong and got back to their old surroundings. I think Anne should understand that her audience is not naïve as she assumes.

Chapter 7 – Territory and the Definition of Being Sikh: Page 224

A list of behavioral requirements was thus insufficient; the designation of an identity in point (g), was required for a hereditary office holder to be eligible for office. Further restrictions on identity were and have been debated, such as regarding the necessity of being an amritdhari or initiated Sikh versus being a keshdhari or bearer of the long hair prescribed for members of the Khalsa.....[Page 227]

Anne is quoting part of the ‘Rahit Maryada’ and language from the Punjab Legislative Council Debates. Those that make history, rarely write their history. It is not the Lion but the hunter who writes the tale any way he chooses. I find it abundantly amusing that Anne needs to be reminded that just because the ‘hunter’ is debating whether the Lion is defined by his mane or not does not make the Lion any different. The Lion always had a mane and will continue to do so regardless of the infighting, changes in season, including the genetic/non-genetic flaws. There are native Intuits in Anne’s country whose oral traditions have been pretty much the same for eons, till the white man took over their land. So does that mean unless and until a white man, in this case a

white woman puts all their (Intuits) traditions in writing, their entire past is questionable. That line of thinking is really repugnant and mocks common sense.

At the same time, in the final speech of Master Tara Singh – a major political figure in the late colonial period and the first two decades after independence – to the Punjab Legislative Council, he deemphasized “history” as a constituting element in defining a gurdwara. Instead, his argument hinged on property rights and the role of the gurdwara in the Sikh community.....[Page229]

Master Tara Singh like his title states; was a village school teacher, a first generation convert to the Sikh Faith, and with very close blood ties to the Hindus. Tara Singh was well-meaning but with a limited vision, and very poor skills in statecraft. In hindsight he realized many of his own shortcomings and follies committed in the heat of the moment. But it was too late as much water had run under the bridge. A man with limited acumen who could not grasp the requirements needed to convey the additional ‘historical’ perspective to add weightage to the other arguments.

Place came to be conceived as property, and tied to the individuals. Under the 1925 Act, history and identity (who is a Sikh, who uses a site, and how are they proved as a Sikh) came to constitute the argument to reevaluating individual ownership of Sikh shrines, and as such scripted a new way of understanding the landscape of Punjab as historically Sikh and under the control of the community as a bounded unit (and in this way very distinct from Hinduism. Which was viewed unbounded and inclusive.....[Pages239-20]

Anne keeps bringing up the Sikh identity repeatedly. In the mid-18th century the Khalsa had a price on their head by the Mughal (Muslim) administration and were nearly decimated to a man. Does that mean the marker of the Sikh identity had to be redefined at that timeline in history? There were no white folks observing the Sikhs; as though without their blessing our history would be different. Sikhs need to change the touchstone and benchmarks created by ‘these’ (mostly white) western scholars, because they keep trying to stick a square peg into a round hole and this will continue to pose problems.

In parallel and directly related way, history, place, and Sikhness were co-inscribed within the legislation associated with the Sikh Gurdwara Act, and necessitated by the means of representation granted by the British, based as it was on the designation of the individual and bounded religious communities in its representations of the past. The mapping of Punjab as Sikh, represented in the Gurdwara guides and legislated through the Gurdwara Reform Act, was a result.....[Page 243]

Anne’s statement makes me wonder how such an intelligent researcher misses the fact that it took nearly 100 years for the Sikhs to form a kingdom of their own. From the mid-18th century the coalescing had begun and finally at the end of the 18th century there was a Sikh kingdom, which lasted another half a century. The British were not dumb, as it was pretty obvious that, that geographic area was the heartland of the Sikhs. All this predated the Gurdwara Act by nearly 75

years. This is akin to an ‘entity’ stripping a person’s uniform completely but then slowly over a long time allowing the person to put on pieces of the uniform back on again and in the meantime that same ‘entity’ also now redefines the new uniform knowing fully well what the old uniform they stripped off the person, looked like.

The Sikh example demonstrates a larger phenomenon. The early twentieth century witnessed the transformation of the evidence of history into the evidence of “nation” within the Indian response to colonial historiography.....[Page 248]

I wonder if the Sikh nation was a figment of someone’s imagination! Fortunately, a century of really tough trials and tribulations put the Sikhs on a firm footing, which was a culmination and fruition of the seeds planted by the ten Gurus into a Sikh kingdom ruled by Maharaja Ranjit Singh for 50 years. Further there was no such entity as India, but only an amalgamation of several hundred kingdoms put together by the East India Company managed by the British. Therefore Anne portrayal of the ‘nation within the Indian response’ does not make any sense.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion: Community, Territory, and the Afterlife of the Object: Page 250

Objects provide a wider field of meanings, not as clearly tied to territory, and thus provide an opportunity for the articulation of multiple notions of the sovereign community, alluding to the fundamentally de-territorialized imagination of the Sikh community highlighted by Georgia Shani, who has argued that it “may also be possible to speak of ‘new’ counter-hegemonic diasporic Sikh identity: an identity made possible by the nationalist project but opposed to its territorializing, reifying imperatives,” a project which “implies a rejection of the assimilationist project of the nation-state” in keeping with “the contemporary phase of globalization [which] has effectively de-territorialized sovereignty.....[Page 264]

Georgia Shani has written an extremely shallow and immature book earlier, which Anne is quoting here. If the above statement by Anne is true, all these writers are slowly and permanently eroding the political sovereignty of the Sikhs, because they have assumed a position which seems to fit a particular “state’s rationale and agenda” and thereby brainwashing the Sikhs into accepting their current situation as a permanent one.

The single theme running through the entire book is that the Sikh identity is being questioned and a shadow of doubt being cast on the Sikh collective of being one homogenous Keshdahari unit. Anne Murphy like most academics of her ilk speak from both sides of their mouth. The book contains a lot of fluff which can be attributed to either ignoring the research through her well-meaning Sikh friends and instead using much from the McLeodian clique of Sikh Chair holders in Canada and the US. Anne is subtle but very cleverly disguised her premise stating that the Sikh identity is a production of the Singh Sabha, as though for the preceding over two centuries the Khalsa identity was in flux. If that is not caustically patronizing I do not know what is? It seems like the entire McLeodian clique in various shades is out to erode the Sikh ethos, except the methodology is getting cleverer and subtler day by day. The Singh Sabha movement

in the early 20th century was only a timely ‘revival’ of all the ‘relevant continuous Sikh traditions’ which were always very real and was not a new production or the start of something new, as the Annes, Oberois and McLeods of the world continue to tout very vocally.

The period immediately after the devious annexation of the Sikh Kingdom by the British to the rest of the East India Company ‘Estate’, was one of great shock to all Sikhs. In this unbelievable vacuum, starting with the proselytizing of the kidnapped child king Dalip Singh to setting up Christian missions, churches and other evangelizing activities, the British had a clear plan to curtail the fiery Sikh spirit any which way they could. So much so the British had the belligerence to build a massive church with a spire right next to the parikarma a few yards from the main entrance to the Darbar Sahib and the gospel was preached in the area surrounding the Darbar Sahib. If the British were in love with the Sikhs it is strange why they promoted the German anti-Sikh writer Ernest Trumpp rather than the British writer Max Arthur Maxauliffe who was completely sidelined and ignored. If the British were in love with the Sikhs why on earth did it take Sikh soldiers to peacefully protest in order to reinstate the wearing of the kirpan upon the formal initiation ceremony, since the carrying of the kirpan was banned for nearly seventy years. Seeing the leaderless and extremely weak situation of the Sikhs, Dayanand aka Mool Shankar a Gujarati Brahmin sticks his tentacles into the land of the Sikhs – Panjab. Dayanand a rabid Hindu started not only to proselytize but also denigrate the Sikh Gurus very publicly. Initially even some prominent Sikhs stood up for him, then realizing very quickly his real motives, backed off. With no political power, no organized leadership, no clergy, no organized religious structure, a Faith group becomes easy prey and a soft target for others including the rotten apples within to dilute the faith, like it happened to the Sikh Faith during the later part of the 19th century.

Anne Murphy has tried to highlight ‘material items’ to be of great religious significance and reverence to the Sikhs in her thesis. In reality the opposite is true. Sikhs simply believe in a Creator, a higher authority, not bowing to any human entity, political or religious but trying to abide by the dictates of the Gurus as in the final scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib. All else is equal to simply emotional ties, just like a wife keeps a deceased husband’s clothes to remember and not to worship him. A mundane book with not much of any significance.